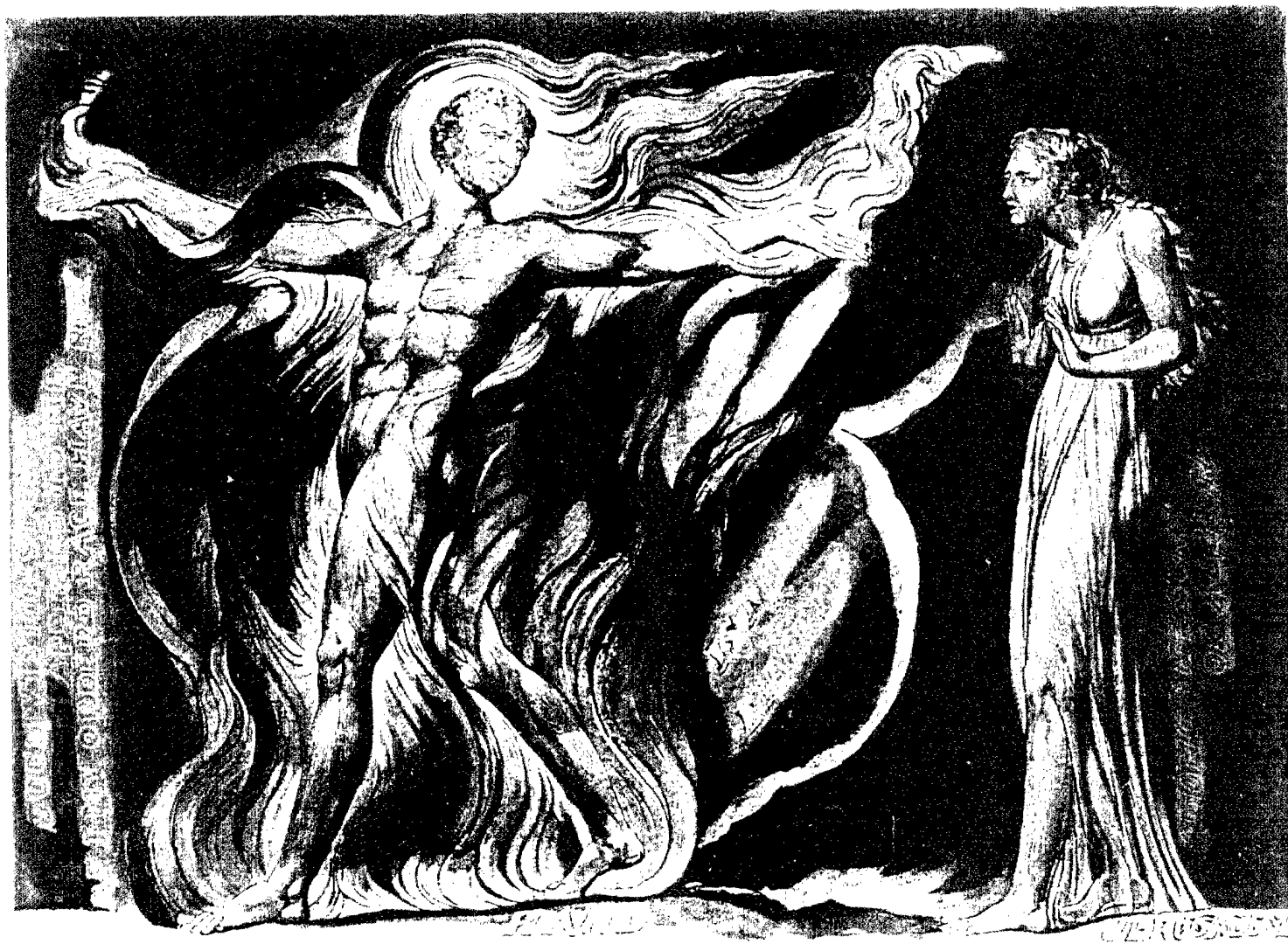


The Crazy Dumbsaint of the Mind
OR
Poet-Prophets of the Beat and Beatific:
William Blake's Resurrection in the American Beat Generation

Gregory M Dandeleas



REPORT DOCUMENTATION PAGE			Form Approved OMB No. 0704-0188	
Public reporting burden for this collection of information is estimated to average 1 hour per response, including the time for reviewing instructions, searching existing data sources, gathering and maintaining the data needed, and completing and reviewing the collection of information. Send comments regarding this burden estimate or any other aspect of this collection of information, including suggestions for reducing this burden, to Washington Headquarters Services, Directorate for Information Operations and Reports, 1215 Jefferson Davis Highway, Suite 1204, Arlington, VA 22202-4302, and to the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reduction Project (0704-0188), Washington, DC 20503.				
1. AGENCY USE ONLY (Leave blank)	2. REPORT DATE 27.Oct.04	3. REPORT TYPE AND DATES COVERED THESIS		
4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE THE CRAZY DUMBSAINT OF THE MIND OR POET-PROPHETS OF THE BEAT AND BEATIFIC: WILLIAM BLAKE'S RESURRECTION IN THE AMERICAN BEAT GENERATION		5. FUNDING NUMBERS		
6. AUTHOR(S) 2D LT DANDELES GREGORY M				
7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS CHICAGO		8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER CI04-653		
9. SPONSORING/MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) THE DEPARTMENT OF THE AIR FORCE AFIT/CIA, BLDG 125 2950 P STREET WPAFB OH 45433		10. SPONSORING/MONITORING AGENCY REPORT NUMBER		
11. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES				
12a. DISTRIBUTION AVAILABILITY STATEMENT Unlimited distribution In Accordance With AFI 35-205/AFIT Sup 1		12b. DISTRIBUTION CODE		
13. ABSTRACT (Maximum 200 words)				
DISTRIBUTION STATEMENT A Approved for Public Release Distribution Unlimited <div style="font-size: 2em; font-weight: bold;">20041102 042</div>				
14. SUBJECT TERMS		15. NUMBER OF PAGES 55		
		16. PRICE CODE		
17. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF REPORT	18. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF THIS PAGE	19. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF ABSTRACT	20. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT	

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OR
Poet-Prophets of the Beat and Beatific:
William Blake's Resurrection in the American Beat Generation

Gregory M Dandeleles

Qualifying Paper, University of Illinois at Chicago

Professor Mark Canuel

August 20, 2004

"To bathe in the Waters of Life; to wash off the Not Human
 I come in Self-annihilations & the grandeur of Inspiration
 To cast off Rational Demonstration by Faith in the Saviour
 To cast off the rotten rags of Memory by Inspiration
 To cast off Bacon, Locke & Newton from Albions covering
 To take off his filthy garments, & clothe him with Imagination
 To cast aside from Poetry, all that is not Inspiration
 That it no longer shall dare to mock with the aspersion of madness
 Cast on the Inspired, by the tame high finisher of paltry Blots,
 Indefinite, or paltry Rhymes; or paltry Harmonies."

--William Blake, *Milton*

"Father, father, where are you going
 O do not walk so fast.
 Speak father, speak to your little boy
 Or else I shall be lost,
 The night was dark no father was there
 The child was wet with dew.
 The mire was deep, & the child did weep
 And away the vapour flew."

--William Blake, "The Little Boy Lost"

On August 6, 1945, "Little Boy" was lost, along with approximately 200,000 lives and four square miles of earth, as the radioactive vapors of this ironically named "Little Boy," the world's first operational nuclear weapon, flew through the center of the Japanese city of Hiroshima. Out of the fallout fell out a group of writers who responded to this newest apocalypse, to the madness of a world bent on annihilating itself, with a madness all their own. The poetry and prose of this small group of avant-garde writers, self-proclaimed as the Beat Generation, continues a tradition of prophecy and visionary poetry from Emerson, Whitman, and Milton, all the way back to Ezekiel, Isaiah, and ancient shamans from around the world. The most influential of these visionaries on the Beats was William Blake, the prophet of the same force that drove the Beats, the God of imagination.

William Blake's literary visions and primordial experiences made him as much prophet as poet. Blake claimed to have held visionary conversations with the poets of the past, with Homer, Dante, Milton, Shakespeare, and "all the majestic shadows, grey but luminous, and superior to the common heights of men" (Qtd. Korteling 91). While Blake, through these and other visions, repeatedly re-invoked, re-imagined, and rewrote the prophecies of Ezekiel, Isaiah, St. John, Dante, and Milton in his poetry, the most central theme in his work is his rejection of the "systems," religions, traditions, and laws created around the visions of other poet-prophets. "I must create my own system" Blake declares in *Jerusalem*, "or be enslaved by another man's / I will not Reason & Compare: my business is to Create" (10: 20-21). This, as Harold Bloom calls it, "Anxiety of Influence" resulted in Blake's creation of a mystifyingly complex mythology and poetic vision he claims was inspired more by the visions behind other prophetic poetry than the poetry itself. Poetry written not from the psychological mode of conscious thought and reason, but the "visionary mode."

Carl Jung explains that the "visionary mode," deriving its existence from the "hinterland of man's mind," appears to emerge "from the abyss of pre-human ages, or from a superhuman world of contrasting light and darkness. It is a 'primordial experience' that transcends human understanding" (Qtd. *Visionary* 2-3). Blake's epic poems *Milton* and *Jerusalem*, for example, were, according to Blake, written effortlessly as the transcription of a voice speaking or "dictating" to the poet. He subsequently considered himself, in writing his poetry, to be a "true Orator" whose work, coming from beyond conscious reason, could not be enslaved in the bondage of rhyme or monotonous cadences (*Jerusalem* 3). What we know of God, through the visions of "true Orators" like Blake, Ezekiel, Isaiah, Daniel, and other prophets has, however, been filtered through, as Amos Wilder calls it, a "progressive culturizing of the initial vision"

(Qtd *Visionary* 6). This is the only way we are capable of reasoning out or “understanding” with our senses what is beyond us. Hermeneutics become poetics as their attempts to explain or dissect the original vision ultimately only leads to a new claim to authority. Blake, however, explains in poems like *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, that this system of rationalizing is a destructive force not of the primordial existence of an external God, but of the imagination. Conventional ideas of divinity, like the Bible; and even prophetic works that have been overanalyzed and interpreted by reason and religion become themselves systems of “enslaving the vulgar by attempting to realize or abstract the mental deities from their objects; thus began priesthood” (11). Blake’s poetry, then, doesn’t just bring to life a new, personal mythology and philosophy from the primordial, “visionary mode,” but it tears apart the existing religious, political, and societal systems which enslave such “vulgar,” “mental deities.”

This political and artistic radicalism is so elaborate, individualized, even inconsistent, Blake probably never imagined his poetry capable of becoming the source of a new enslaving system like the systems he was tearing down. He wrote loosely of visions so unrefined they could only exist as themselves. Ironically Blake’s writing, which was almost completely ignored during his life, has arguably been more influential not only to poetry, but visual art, music, and politics than any other poet of the Romantic era. A neglected artist during his life, Blake became by the end of the twentieth century an occultist, revolutionary, surrealist, and prophet of the counter-culture.

As Blake’s poetic visions of the primordial incorporate the texts of Milton, Ezekiel and other prophet-poets who came before him, he too shows up in the visions and poetry of future “prophet’s of the counter-culture.” In 1945, the same year that “Little Boy” was lost over the skies of Hiroshima, forever changing and further dividing the American psyche, William Blake

visited Allen Ginsberg and read aloud "Ah Sun-flower!" ("A Blake Experience" 122). Then again, in 1948, he "had a visionary experience catalyzed by reading 'The Sick Rose'" (122). Ginsberg explained, "I thought I heard William Blake's voice, basso, 'The Ancient of Days'" (*Holy Soul* 21). "I was never able to figure out whether I was having a religious vision, a hallucinatory experience, or what," Ginsberg continued, "but it was the deepest 'spiritual' experience I had in my life, and determined my karma as poet. That's the key pivotal turnabout of my own existence. That's why I was hung up on setting Blake to music" (21). Ginsberg sang Blake's poems to audiences and in the studio, he borrowed symbols, and repeatedly wrote about the Blake visions themselves. Blake was, according to Ginsberg, "the catalytic poet who turned me on to the idea that poetry could awake people's consciousness. That seems to be an effect of this poetry on other people. To awaken some awareness of feeling or depth of space or vastness" (21). Ginsberg later renounced Blake as *the* "catalyst" of his poetry in order to achieve a more personal vision, but continued to describe the English visionary as his spiritual "guru" and guide.

In a 1967 interview published in the *Paris Review*, Ginsberg still claimed that William Blake was one of the two most influential artists on his method. The other was William S. Burroughs, who with Ginsberg and Jack Kerouac founded the Beat literary movement in America (*Spontaneous Mind* 32). Burroughs, like Blake, claimed his poetry was dictated to him by voices. "Don't ask me," Burroughs said when asked about his novel *Naked Lunch*, "I get these messages from other planets. I'm apparently some kind of agent from another planet but I haven't got my orders clearly decoded yet. I'm shitting out my educated Middlewest background once and for all" (Qtd. Morgan 263). Burroughs, who also read Blake extensively, never cited him as an influence on his work, but whatever planet Burroughs claims to have been

from seems to represents the very same mythical, artistic, and spiritual center that lies within Blake's poetry (mythical centers like Jerusalem and the Four Fold City).

The third and most famous of Blake's American counterculture disciples is the so-called "king of Beats," Jack Kerouac, who repeatedly named Blake as one of his favorite artists and an important inspiration. From the very early years of Kerouac's life he was seeing outside the boundaries of accepted reality. Kerouac explains his enlightenment as a young aspiring writer in *Vanity of Duluo* claiming, "I began to get a new vision of my own of a truer darkness which just overshadowed all this overlaid mental garbage of 'existentialism' and 'hipsterism' and bourgeois 'decadence.'" Kerouac, like Blake created over the course of his connected prose, his own personal mythology based on autobiographical experiences, "mystical visions," and spontaneous prose that mix and twist existing symbols from Western and Eastern mythology and religion with personal ones. From 1954 on, Kerouac argued that the meaning of the Beat generation was to not only be beat down tired of the madness of society (its original explanation) but to be spiritually beatific. Just as Blake said, "all religions are one," Kerouac mixes Buddhism and Catholicism. Also like Blake, however, Kerouac proclaimed that beyond these religions and laws, "YOUR OWN PRIVATE MIND IS GREATER THAN ALL" (Qtd. in Charters, 586).

It is clear that many similarities exist between Blake's prophetic poetry and the spontaneous prose of the three principal members of the Beat generation. Yet many Blakean critics, such as Harold Bloom, who claims "Blake's poems, especially his epics, seem to me the best poetry in English since Milton," belittles the Beats' connection to Blake and other American Romantics, as well as their relevance as anything more than mere period pieces (*Blake's Apocalypse* 9) "*Howl*, rather like *On the Road*," explains Bloom of these two defining works of the Beat Generation, "strikes me as an Oedipal lament, weeping in the wilderness for a mother's

consolation. What both works lack sorely is the delicately nuanced artistry of our father, Walt Whitman, whose greatest poems my *look* easy. But actually are superbly difficult. *On the Road* and *Howl* look easy, and *are* easy, self-indulgent evasions of the American quest for identity” (*Modern Interpretations* 2). Other critics, like Alex Albright and Robert Hipkiss point out Blake’s influence on the Beats as proof, contrary to Kerouac’s own “blustery claims,” that spontaneous writing did not originate with their movement (117). Hipkiss points out that Blake claimed that his *Milton* “was written effortlessly, the transcription of a voice speaking to the poet” (117).

It is true that Kerouac, Ginsberg, and Burroughs each had the same anxiety of influence that Blake possessed, but their resistance against Blake’s influence does not make their place in literature less significant, rather it places the Beats closer to Blake and his own mad claims of originality. The Beats are true Blakeans because they were willing to renounce Blake and to find the visionary state from which Blake’s art originated. And while the staunch traditionalist, Harold Bloom, dismisses the two benchmark Beat works, *On the Road* and *Howl*, as low art that supposedly pale in comparison to Blake and the other great writers who served as their inspiration, it is this “lowness,” Ginsberg’s homoerotic obsession with the body and Kerouac’s freeness, of language and from literary convention for example, which make them Blakean.

Kerouac’s unclear message and shifting symbols, his unwillingness to revise or subject his art to reason and craft may, in Bloom’s eyes, make his art low, but this very method comes out of a mystical tradition that Blake, whom Bloom claims to admire above all English poets since Milton, helps define. “Comparing *On the Road* to the masterpieces of Classic American fiction is,” according to Bloom, “most unkind to Kerouac” (1). This is only true, however, if in this comparison, one expects Kerouac’s writing to function exclusively within the paradigm

established by these writers and demanded by the elitist, stodgy critics, like Bloom. Rather it is only in the tradition of breaking traditions, in favor of something beyond social conventions and conceptions of art that drives both Blake and the Beats. "My position in the current American literary scene," claimed Kerouac himself, "is simply that I got sick and tired of the conventional English sentence" (*Kerouac Reader* 486). It doesn't appear that the Beats wrote with the intention of having critics like Harold Bloom as readers. In some ways, however, they were writing in direct opposition to the very status quo that Bloom fights to uphold, the dogmatic standards of literature. Bloom says that the Beats' art looks easy and *is* easy, yet he manages to completely miss its point. Bloom, for all his appreciation of Blake, gets stuck on Blake, ultimately "enslaving the vulgar" of Blake's poetry "by attempting to realize or abstract" as Blake explains, "the mental deities from their objects" (*Marriage* 11). Bloom appreciates Blake's poetry without understanding the spirit behind it, as he closes his mind to the next step in its mystical lineage. Bloom himself admits in the first sentence of his anthology of essays examining *On the Road*: "I had not reread *On the Road* during the near half-century since its first publication, and I am not happy at encountering it again" (486).

By placing the Beat Generation within the context of its spiritual and prophetic lineage I intend to defend and legitimize the often-criticized madness of the Beat generation. This is, of course, not to trivialize the Beat Generation as purely derivative of Blake's mysticism, but rather, as an extension of it into a post world war America in which Blake's Romantic depictions of the French and American Revolutions are replaced with a much more ominous political moment defined by the threat of nuclear armageddon. Naturally, the work of the Beat Generation diverges as much from Blake's poetry as their time and place diverge from eighteenth century London. By pointing out the Beats' beatific uses of Blakean images and philosophies, as well as

their divergence from them in the creation of new, as Kerouac put it, "unspeakable visions of the individual," I hope to legitimize the relevance of Blake to the Beats, the Beats to Blake, and both to the imagination of each individual.

Revolution Bleeds Across Borders:

Over a century-and-a-half before the Beats brought Blake's philosophies to America in their literature, Blake, in his poem *America*, describes the spirit of rebellion as crossing the Atlantic to Great Britain from America and inspiring, particularly in London and Bristol, open demonstrations against the war, which temporarily deranged the guardians of the status quo and hastened the coming of peace (Erdman 7). When the French Revolution broke out in 1789, however, Blake had the sense that a stifling and violent culture of conformity had manifested itself in England. William Pitt's government began to suppress political opposition of all kinds, fearing the spread of revolution from France. When the two countries went to war in 1793, the pressure to conform intensified and was to last more or less to the end of Blake's life. Above all else, asserts Jon Mee, "Blake's 'Republican Art' would seem to be pitted against this uniformity of 'One King one God one Law'" (134).

A similar reactionary response of governmentally enforced conformity existed for the Beats in Cold War America, as McCarthyism stifled and trampled on civil liberties in attempts to stop possible proliferation of Communism from the Soviet Union. American fear of Communism during the 1950's was based on the same theories that petrified the English government in 1793, that revolution bleeds across borders and must be fought abroad and domestically in order to maintain the status quo. Domestically, the government used FBI black lists, the House Un-American Actions Committee, the suppression of working class and civil rights, obscenity trials and censorship, and culture industry images that pictured a homogeneous

United States whose constituents were white, affluent, heterosexual, suburbanite, and superficial American families. The Beat Generation's politically and culturally subversive and radical art was intrinsically oppositional to these institutions and cultural norms, as it symbolizes the struggle of the individual against government, corporate, ideological, and aesthetic power. This art was, in its time, subsequently labeled anti-American and subjected to a series of censorship trials: Ginsberg's *Howl* in 1956, Burroughs' *Naked Lunch* in 1962, Kandel's *The Love Book* in 1966, and Michael McCulre's *The Beard* in 1967 (Skerl 1). As each of these authors won their cases against the government they helped put the final nail in the coffin of literary censorship as well as earn notoriety and celebrity within the popular culture.

The term "Beatnik" was coined by Herb Caen of the *San Francisco Chronicle* on April 2, 1958 as a derogatory term, a reference to the Russian satellite Sputnik, which managed to suggest that the beats were, culturally and politically, "way out there" and, worse yet, pro-Communist. The derogatory term not only stuck, but became the popular label associated with a new stereotype of the literature and growing influence of the Beat Generation. After the publication of *On the Road*, a *Life* Magazine article referred to the Beat Generation as "talkers, loafers, passive little con men, lonely eccentrics, mom-haters, cop-haters, exhibitionists with abused smiles and second mortgages on a bongo-drum—writers who cannot write" (qtd Lardas 18). Ironically, this stereotype of "anti-American" Beatniks was used to attack philosophies that are fundamentally American.

The political position and antinomianism of the Beats, in many ways, follow the traditions of great American poets like Walt Whitman and Transcendentalists who not only captured American culture in their work but helped define it. It was also through these artists that revolution did, in fact, bleed across borders, bringing English Romanticism and Blakean

radicalism to the United States. Blake was introduced to American writers, according to Shirley Dent, primarily through American Swedenborgians, who, along with English Swedenborgians, were among the first to publish Blake's poetry. We know that James Garth Wilkenson's edition of *Songs of Innocence and of Experience* had a direct influence in the circle of American Transcendentalists. There is even a copy of this edition in which Emerson inscribed "R.W. Emerson / for his friend / E.P.P." on the inside cover (Qtd Dent 25). E.P.P. stands for Elizabeth Palmer Peabody, whose bookshop was a meeting place for the "Transcendental Club" in the eighteen thirties and forties.

These Transcendentalists, in the tradition of Blake and other English Romantics they read, valorized the American Revolution and ideals of democracy and individual freedoms, but ultimately believed that religious and even secular authority was based not on institutions but on a personal, experiential appeal to reality. In his essay "Self-Reliance," Emerson says: "Insist on yourself, never imitate" (1174). "Whoso would be a man, must be a nonconformist... Nothing is at last sacred but the integrity of our own mind," (1162). "Trust thyself; every heart vibrates to that iron string" (qtd Hughes 107). Whitman absorbed Emerson's ideas, further developing the role of the common man as poet: "I was simmering, simmering, simmering; Emerson brought me to a boil" (Qtd. Stiles 42). Although it is not entirely clear whether or not Whitman read Blake, this creative boiling point resulted in poetry that Donald Pease says, "begins where Blake ends" (16). This poetry was arguably as influential on Ginsberg as Blake's poetry, as Donald Pease notes, in Whitman's work, "there exist none of the mythological figures of Blake's epic prophecies" (31). Blake had used his vast and complex cast of mythological figures to deliver the consciousness of England from the "conventional systems" of myth and religion. Whitman, however, like Ginsberg after him, was more interested in creating Gods and prophets in his

readers rather than in his poetry. "The messages of great poets to each man and woman are," Whitman explains in the 1855 preface to *Leaves of Grass*, "Come to us on equal terms... We are no better than you... Did you suppose that there could be only one Supreme? We affirm there can be unnumbered Supremes... and that men can be good or grand only of the consciousness of their supremacy within them" (Qtd Pease 32).

It is not surprising that the Beats would identify with Whitman's "democratic vistas" and the self-reliant ethos of Emerson and Henry David Thoreau while celebrating their individualism and personal experience within the confines of a small but select group. The Transcendental Club, composed mainly of ministers who were repelled by John Locke's view that the mind is a passive receiver of sense impressions, were enthusiastic of Blakean and Romantic philosophies that the mind is creative in perception. They believed strongly in the presence of the human soul and the theory that, as Blake explains, "If the doors of perception were cleansed everything would appear to man as it is, infinite. / For man has closed himself up, till he sees all things thro' narrow chinks of his cavern" (*Marriage of Heaven* 14). Emerson believed that anyone could cleanse these "doors of perception" and achieve what Blake calls extra sensory perception by thinking as a poet, who "like the electric rod, must reach from a point nearer the sky than all surrounding objects, down to the earth, and into the dark wet soil, or neither is of use" ("The Poet" 1184).

Ralph Waldo Emerson envisioned a role for the poet and artist within society as a liberating god, who, "through that better perception stands on a step nearer to things" ("The Poet" 1183). For Emerson, the poet is a Representative man, a sayer, seer, namer, language maker, and prophet, a man born with superior intellect and perception so that he speaks for all men, who, by possessing the powers of creativity and imagination, are all poets in their own

right. In this respect, every man's endeavors reflect his own divinity, which is seen by Emerson as dwelling within the imagination. Poetics can thus be used as a means of catching glimpses of what Emerson called the "over-soul," "Power," or the uncreated that exists within every created thing. Just as Pitt's government in England and McCarthy in America worried, revolution bled across borders, only it wasn't the French revolution or communism, as they had feared. Rather, it was political radicalism that crossed the Atlantic from Blake's poetry to Emerson's pithy essays, into Whitman's poetry and across a century to the Beat generation.

Ginsberg who knew Blake himself from visions also knew him through his American disciples. As Blake was his "spiritual guide," Ginsberg describes Walt Whitman as his "dear father, graybeard, lonely old courage-teacher" in "A Supermarket in California." Whitman writes in "Song of Myself," "I hear and behold God in every object, yet I understand God not in the least." ("Song of Myself"; line 1274). Ginsberg echoes this line when he writes in "Footnote to Howl:"

The world is holy! The soul is holy! The skin is holy! The nose is holy!

The tongue and cock and hand and asshole holy!

Everything is holy! Everybody's holy! Everywhere is holy! Everyday is in

Eternity! Everyman's an angel!

The bum's as holy as the seraphim! The madman is holy as you my soul are

Holy! (*Collected Poems* 134).

Kerouac writes about Neal Cassady with the same celebration in *On the Road*:

And he stood swaying in the middle of the room, eating his cake and

looking at everyone with awe. He turned and looked around behind him.

Everything amazed him, everything he saw... he wanted to see from all

possible levels and angles... He was finally an Angel, as I always knew he would become...

(*On the Road*; p. 263)

Here, Kerouac uses the motif of becoming an “Angel,” of attaining spirituality and nirvana, throughout his prose. This displays his belief in attaining the sublime through the ordinary, through life and everyday occurrences. In everything, there can be the potential for enlightenment. This was the foundation of the particular method of personal mysticism that Whitman brought to the Beats. As Blake and Emerson saw God in the human imagination, Whitman saw divinity in every blade of grass, Kerouac writes:

And when you showed me Brooklyn Bridge
in the morning,
Ah God,
And the people slipping on the ice in the street,
twice,
That's when you taught me tears, Ah
God, in the morning.

("HYMN"; ll. 1-5, ll. 15-16)

He sees God everywhere, from the people slipping on ice to the “Fat girls / In red coats / With flat, white out shoes / [and] Harried Mexican laborers” (*San Francisco Blues* 5).

As Blake wrote in response to political revolution and violence that threatened to tear apart the social structures of France, England, and England’s rebelling colonies, Whitman composed “Song of Myself” as a Civil War was looming over America threatening to tear apart that young nation. Eventually, the Beats started their literary movement after the dropping of a

bomb that could easily tear the entire world apart. The advent of the nuclear power drastically changed the nature of war and radical politics. The same fear of the people rising up against the government and the status quo that drove England to war in the 1790's, led, one-hundred and sixty years later, to a nuclear arms race that placed not only the status quo in jeopardy, but the fate of the human race. In Blake's *Jerusalem* the Atlantic asks: "Are not Religion & Politics the Same Thing? Brotherhood is Religion" (57: 207). In a post World War Two World, politics weren't just religious, they brought apocalypse to the front of everyone's head.

The relative politics of Blake, the Transcendentalists, and the Beat Generation are very similar, as they each find themselves outside the conventional modes of thought in their own time. The fact that these positions are each relative to the specific political moments and crises that exist in the eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth centuries, however, proves that they are clearly as different as they are similar. Bradley Stiles writes, "any differences in the concept of landscape between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries inevitably must affect the outcome of self-location, because the relative meanings of self and landscape are inextricably connected" (18). Even given the many changes that occurred between Blake's era and the Beat Generation, which altered the conditions of this "self-location," they each believed and intended their poetry to cut through the corruptions and crises of their environments to some primordial place within the self. The political radicalism of the Beats was applied to political and mental systems both similar and divergent from Blake's, but at the heart of their prophecy lies the same force, imagination and the divinity of the human soul.

Allen Ginsberg:

Psalm IV

Now I'll record my secret vision, impossible sight of the face of God:
 It was no dream, I lay broad waking on a fabulous couch in Harlem
 having masturbated for no love, and read half naked an open book of Blake
 on my lap
 Lo & behold! I was thoughtless and turned a page and gazed on the living
 Sun-flower
 and heard a voice, it was Blake's, reciting in earthen measure:
 the voice rose out of the page to my secret ear never heard before-
 I lifted my eyes to the window, red walls of buildings flashed outside,
 endless sky sad Eternity
 sunlight gazing on the world, apartments of Harlem standing in the
 universe--
 each brick and cornice stained with intelligence like a vast living face--
 the great brain unfolding and brooding in wilderness!--Now speaking
 aloud with Blake's voice--
 Love! thou patient presence & bone of the body! Father! thy careful
 watching and waiting over my soul!
 My son! My son! the endless ages have remembered me! My son! My son!
 Time howled in anguish in my ear!
 My son! My son! my father wept and held me in his dead arms (238).

Who

From Great Consciousness vision Harlem 1948 buildings standing in Eternity
 I realized entire universe was manifestation of One Mind-
 My teacher was William Blake-my life work Poesy,
 Transmitting that spontaneous awareness to Mankind (595).
 --Allen Ginsberg

Allen Ginsberg credited two mystical experiences with defining his life's work: his famous Blake visions of 1948, described in poems like "Psalm IV" and "Who," and a vision he had on the Kyoto-Tokyo Express in 1963 that taught him to write beyond the Blake vision and find a more personal truth and universal reality. The first visions caused him to seek altered consciousness as a way of connecting with the eternal, with the ultimate aim of writing poetry that would transcend cultural barriers and communicate universally; the latter convinced him that such a quest for transcendental states of mind denied the even more basic universality of physical

reality. Ginsberg's visions of Blake were very similar to Blake's own visions of his prophetic predecessors. Blake saw and conversed with Christian prophet-poet Ezekiel and poet-prophet John Milton, and then wrote about the visions in his own poetry. Blake did not, however, simply recreate the art or the prophecies of Milton or Ezekiel, but used their primordial visions as the Ur-stuff, the cosmic inspiration of his own new mythology and vision. Ezekiel's vision of the four hayyot or wild beasts pulling God's chariot became, in Blake's poetry, the four Zoas or divine aspects of man. And Milton appears in Blake's poem by the same name, not to restate the claims of *Paradise Lost* but to reexamine and correct them. As Ezekiel wrote from his visions of the Merkabah, and Blake, his visions of Ezekiel, Ginsberg wrote of his Blake visions, continuing the tradition as a chosen poet and prophet. As Blake told a friend, "I saw Milton in imagination, and he told me to beware of being misled by his *Paradise Lost*" (Qtd. Damon 276). Ginsberg too came to realize, with his 1963 vision, that he could not let Blake mislead him or his art, that to be a true visionary poet he had to rewrite the visions of the past.

Allen Ginsberg's inaugural vision of Blake in 1948 helped him realize his role in life: "now that I have seen this heaven on earth, I will never forget it, and I will never stop referring all things to it, I will never stop considering it the center of my human existence and the center of my life which is now changed." (Qtd. Portuges 131). After the vision, Ginsberg came to consider himself, as he considered Blake, to be a "chosen, blessed, sacred, poet." As a sacred poet, Ginsberg felt he must successfully recreate the "cosmic consciousness" of his visions in his poems. It must have been a similar feeling that overcame Blake when he was just a child sitting under a tree and the visionary prophet Ezekiel came to him, when a vision of his dead brother Robert gave him the idea for illuminated printing, or when Milton entered his left foot as a falling star with in the text of *Milton*.

As Blake told friends that his epic poems, like *Jerusalem* and *Milton*, were dictated to him by spirits and voices from visionary trances, Ginsberg began writing poems almost exclusively about the visions he had of Blake's voice, accompanied by the power of God he saw in everything that surrounded him: the "endless sky sad Eternity / sunlight gazing on the world, apartments of Harlem standing in the / universe-- / each brick and cornice stained with intelligence like a vast living face" (*Collected Poems* 238). During this vision, Harlem came to contain, for Ginsberg, the same spiritual importance and divinity that London held for Blake. It was "the great brain unfolding and brooding in wilderness!--Now speaking" (238).

Ginsberg said in a 1965 interview, after the first vision, Blake's voice returned with the poem, "The Sick Rose." This time Ginsberg claims, it was a slightly different "sense-depth-mystic impression" (*Spontaneous Mind* 38). When Blake's spirit voice read "Ah Sunflower," Ginsberg came to realize that he was the sunflower and chosen to be a poet. Later, however, while listening to the same voice recite "The Sick Rose," Ginsberg came to realize that the sick rose was also him, or at least "self, or the living body, sick because the mind, which is the worm 'That flies in the night, In the howling storm,' or Urizen, reason; Blake's character might be the one that's entered the body and is destroying it" (*SM* 38). Ginsberg felt that he needed to record these visions in his own poetry as he says that he experienced "The Sick Rose" vision as something that applied to the whole universe as well as himself, "like hearing the doom of the whole universe, and at the same time the inevitable beauty of doom" (*SM* 38). Ginsberg describes the experience as, "very awesome... So, like a prophecy, not only in human terms but a prophecy as if Blake had penetrated the very secret core of the entire universe and had come forth with some little magic formula statement in rhyme and rhythm that, if properly heard in the inner inner ear, would deliver you beyond the universe" (39). It was not enough for Ginsberg to

simply hear this voice in his “inner inner ear,” and have this spiritual experience. The experience became something he wanted to recreate not just for himself from Blake’s voice, but from his own voice as heard in the so-called “inner inner” ears of those who read or heard his own poetry and prophecy.

That same day Ginsberg heard Blake’s voice once again. The voice repeated a refrain from “The Little Girl Lost:”

Do father, mother, weep?

Where can Lyca sleep?

How can Lyca sleep

...

If her mother weep?

...

If her heart does ache

Then let Lyca wake;

If my mother sleep,

Lyca shall not weep. (39)

For a third time, Ginsberg realized that Blake was not just speaking to him, but of him. He understood the poem from an introspective standpoint in which he was Lyca, or “Lyca was the self; father, mother seeking Lyca wad God seeking Father, the Creator; and ‘If her heart does ache/ Then let Lyca wake’” (*SM* 39). In writing about this experience Ginsberg was faced with the question of what he, as Lyca, was supposed to wake to? What was he to awaken in his readers? His initial conclusion was, simply, the existence of the entire universe. “The total consciousness then, of the complete universe, Which is what Blake was talking about. In other

words a breakthrough from ordinary habitual quotidian consciousness into consciousness that was really seeing all of heaven in a flower. Or what was it-eternity in a flower... heaven in a grain of sand? As I was seeing heaven in the cornice of the building.” (39). Ginsberg, at this early point in his poetic life, felt he needed these visions to see, as Blake, Whitman, and Emerson did before him, the divinity of everything.

As Ginsberg’s visionary experiences were repeated, he was convinced that this was his calling to be a poet. He began studying Blake’s poetry religiously, trying to recapture the same experience. Ginsberg wrote at least nine poems about the events of his Blake vision in 1948 and 1949. And he claimed that all of his poems from this period in his life were in some way influenced by the visions and attempts to recreate them. He felt that mystical poetry must be “hermetic communication” which he hoped could be appreciated at a deeper, perhaps unconscious, level of thought:

I immediately saw poetry as a hermetic or secret way of talking about experiences that were universal, cosmic, that everybody knew about, but nobody knew how to refer to, nobody knew how to bring it up in front brain consciousness or to present it to social consciousness (P 135).

Ginsberg began writing about his visions in this “secret way,” creating poetry as cryptic and difficult to understand as Blake’s. He insisted, however, like Blake, that this cryptic poetry is only difficult to understand with reason, difficult to the ego. On a deeper lever, he intended his poetry to move toward the miraculous, the truly universal experiences of higher state of being.

Ginsberg’s early poetry was often rejected as absurd, meaningless, and insane. But he understood Blake’s own difficulties with his contemporaries, who also thought he was crazy and who were suspicious of his insistence that he wrote much of his poetry while under the power of

a visionary trance. Ginsberg was encouraged when he read that Blake ignored his critics and devoted his energies to the problem of transposing visions into great poetry. So Ginsberg also responds in his poem "Refrain":

The air is dark, the night is sad,
I lie sleepless and I groan.
Nobody cares when a man goes mad:
He is sorry, God is glad.
Shadow changes into bone.

Also like Blake, Ginsberg realizes here that when mysticism is mistaken for madness, it is often ignored, "Nobody cares when a man goes mad." "'Shadow changes into bone' was," explains Ginsberg of his own poem, "my symbolic language meaning Thought, high intellectual thought, ambition, idealized desire" (P136). The shadows of thought and imagination are transformed into "three dimensional bone," something real and tangible in the poetry itself.

Paul Portuges argues in his essay "The Poetics of Vision," that the great intelligence Ginsberg describes as shadow in "Refrain" has been reduced to a shadow of the amazing "deep light" light he describes in other poems like "Vision 1948:" "I shudder with intelligence and I / Wake in the deep light... / Intolerable to me, too bright / And shaken in the sight" (CP 8). Portuges says, "the great intelligence, the amazing light, had been reduced to a shadow, the burden of which was killing him" (137). Ginsberg's use of shadow as "symbolic language for meaning Thought, high intellectual thought, ambition," however, seems to more accurately reference his inspiration for these visionary poems, Blake's "Shadowy Prophet" of Los. Los, like Ginsberg's shadow, is the *expression* of the imagination, seeking to return to "the Eternal bosom" (*Milton* 22:15-16). The "Shadowy" Los is the creator of all that we see: "All Things

Exist in the Human Imagination" (J 69: 25). Los creates Golgonooza, the city of art and Jerusalem, the idea of liberty. Albion--a symbol for both England and mankind in general--mistakes Jerusalem as "The Shadow of delusions" (J 18:11). It seems highly improbable that Blake was not thinking of the "shadowy prophet," Blake's hero, alter ego, and symbol of imagination, when using shadow as a similar symbol in "Refrain," a poem he claims was inspired by his Blake visions.

Ginsberg's "visions" were mostly auditory and out of his own control, occurring at random times or induced by hallucinogenic drugs. Blake's visionary faculty, on the other hand, was so much under control, that, at the wish of a friend, he could summon before his "abstracted gaze" any of the familiar forms and faces he was asked for (Korteling 91). Blake's friend, John Varley, a landscape-painter and astrologer, encouraged Blake to summon poets like Milton, Shakespeare, or Voltair and take authentic sketches of them right before his eyes (92). Ginsberg tried to achieve this same visionary control while he was walking one evening through the middle of Columbia University. He claimed he started invoking the spirit, consciously trying to get another depth perception of the "cosmos." He suddenly felt the same experience he had during the Blake visions only, now, on demand. This, Ginsberg insisted, was a breakthrough, but it was also the last time he obtained that depth of consciousness. He said in an interview for the *Paris Review* that this vision was the same "depth of consciousness or the same cosmical awareness but suddenly it was not blissful at all but it was *frightening*... it was as if I saw God again except God was the devil" (SM 44). God appeared to Ginsberg like a hand of death coming down on him, and was so frightened by the experience that he lost the urge to pursue visions or to, as Blake explains, "find a Western Wrath / Right through the Gates of Wrath." Ginsberg claims to have been at these very Gates from Blake's poetry, but did not urge his way

there. "I shut it all off," the poet explains, "And got scared, and thought, I've gone too far" (*SM* 44).

While this is where Allen Ginsberg's Blake visions ended, he vowed never to forget the truths he saw in them. These visions defined Blake's life and his art, as voices or spirits dictated his greatest epics, *Milton* and *Jerusalem*, to him. Blake never did forget the truths he saw in his visions, but the role they played in his poetry changed dramatically. Blake, who revered Milton as one of the greatest English poet, saw him in visions, and held conversations with his spirit, eventually used him in his poetry to *rewrite* the flaws in his work. The leading purpose of *Milton* the poem was to correct Milton's errors. On December 17, 1825, Crabb Robinson understood Blake to say: "I saw Milton in imagination, and he told me to beware of being misled by his *Paradise Lost*" (Damon 276). Ginsberg too, ended up having the same relationship with Blake. As Milton entered Blake's body through his left foot as a falling star from heaven in the text of *Milton*, Ginsberg felt Blake's spirit enter his body as an electrochemical reaction caused by the rhythm of his poetry:

The interesting thing would be to know if certain combinations of words and rhythms actually had an electrochemical reaction on the body, which could catalyze specific states of consciousness. I think that's what probably happened to me with Blake... there is a hypnotic rhythm there, which when you introduce it into your nervous system, causes all sorts of electronic changes-permanently alter is. (*SM* 31)

Ginsberg had gotten this theory from the French poet Antonin Artaud, that certain music when introduced into the nervous system changes the molecular composition of the nerve cells or, as Ginsberg recalls, "something like that." It permanently alters the being that has experience of

this. In other words, any experience we have is recorded in the brain and goes through neural patterns so that brain recordings are done by means of shifting around of little electrons-so there is actually an electrochemical effect caused by art (*SM* 31-32).

Ginsberg admitted that this electrochemical theory was a “kind of bullshit abstract way” of talking about Blake’s influence on him, but it does express the degree to which Blake influenced Ginsberg in his perception of art as a real and powerful force, a force that both poets believed in above all else. It was the power of Golganooza and Jerusalem, the need to create these places for the mind, to awaken and permanently change the mind. Ginsberg said he was most impressed with this aspect of Blake’s poetry, Blake’s idea of Jerusalem, of “Jerusalemic Britain, which I think is now more and more valid” (*SM* 33). Ginsberg saw Blake’s “naked human form divine, to be Energy... sexualization, or sexual liberation,” forces all the Beats believed in.

As Ginsberg’s poetry developed, Blake stayed with him. Some of his greatest work, *Howl*, “Sunflower Sutra,” and “Kaddish” are also the most Blakean poems of Ginsberg’s career. Shirley Dent even suggests that *Howl* and “Sunflower Sutra,” when taken together, can be read as Ginsberg’s own songs of Experience and Innocence (107). Ginsberg says in *Howl*:

I saw the best minds of my generations destroyed by madness,
 starving hysterical naked,
 dragging themselves through the Negro streets at dawn looking for
 an angry fix,
 angelheaded hipsters burning for the ancient heavenly connection
 to the starry dynamo in the machinery of night...
 who passed through universities with radiant cool eyes

hallucinating Arkansas and Blake-light tragedy among the
scholars of war (126)

The long, irregular, and staggered lines of blank verse here resemble the form of Whitman's "Leaves of Grass" and Blake's epic poems. Ginsberg seems to agree with Blake who writes in the introduction to *Jerusalem* that the "monotony" of conventional rhythm "in the mouth of a true Orator... was not only awkward, but as much a bondage as rhyme itself" (J 3). Blake still claimed, however, that "Every word and every letter is studied and put into its fit place: the terrific numbers are reserved for the terrific parts—the mild & gentle parts, for the mild & gentle parts" (3). Likewise, there is a deliberate method in the structure and rhythm of *Howl*, as it appears on paper the way it should be read aloud. While not written with a strict cadence, there is a song-like rhythm to it, rhythm without monotony. Where Blake claimed he achieved this end by studying and putting lines in their fit place, Ginsberg attributed it to the natural rhythm and flow of spontaneous composition.

In the second part of *Howl*, there is a particularly Blakean moment in which the Urizenic figure of Moloch, the "Mental Moloch... whose name is the Mind," appears in opposition to imaginative power of the best and mad minds of Ginsberg's generation:

What sphinx of cement and aluminum bashed open their skulls
and ate up their brains and imagination?
Moloch! Solitude! Filth! Ugliness! Ashcans and unobtainable
dollars! Children screaming under the stairways! Boys
sobbing in armies! Old men weeping in the parks!
Moloch! Moloch! Nightmare of Moloch! Moloch the loveless!
Mental Moloch! Moloch the heavy judger of men!

Moloch the incomprehensible prison! Moloch the crossbone
 soulless jailhouse and Congress of sorrows! Moloch whose
 buildings are judgment! Moloch the vast stone of war!
 Moloch the stunned governments!
 Moloch whose mind is pure machinery! Moloch whose blood is
 running money! Moloch whose fingers are ten armies!
 ...
 specter of genius! Moloch whose fate is a cloud of sexless
 hydrogen! Moloch whose name is the Mind!

Moloch's role in *Howl* and his 1959 poem "Kaddish," a funeral prayer for his mother, Naomi, is a destructive mental deity, much like Urizen. Ginsberg most likely got Moloch's name from the Hebrew Moloch, a divinity worshipped by the idolatrous Israelites, described in Acts vii, 43. He was the God for whom children were burned alive in sacrifice. Moloch's name comes from the Hebrew "Molech," or king, pronounced, when derogatively referring to the pagan God, as "Moloch," with the vowels from Bosheth, the word for shame. Blake uses the same ancient deity as one of the seven Eyes of God in *Milton*, *The Four Zoas*, and *Jerusalem*. These Eyes represent man's spiritual development from the completely self-centered Lucifer to Jesus. Molech, who burns small children alive and gives nothing in return, follows Lucifer as the second Eye (J 55:32). In Blake's mythology, Molech presides over the "saturnalia of the warriors and the Daughters of Albion," and the warriors invoke this violent God (J 68:17). Blake writes in *Jerusalem*, "Molech rejoices thro' the Land from Havilah to Shur: he rejoices in moral law & its severe penalties" (J 68:38). It is this interpretation of Molech that most closely resembles Ginsberg's Moloch, "the heavy judger of men" and "the vast stone of war" (*Howl*).

In both engravings, men are being tormented in burning flames, Moloch dropping men into a pile of carnage in the streets, trapped in his “sky scrapers” and “demonic industries,” while Urizen entraps his prisoners in the serpents of reason. Where Urizen is usually depicted holding a compass, representing the laws of science and reason, Moloch appears wearing, around his neck, a medallion with a dollar sign on it. Where Blake saw reason as the strongest most corruptive Zoa or “divine aspect of man,” corrupting and imprisoning his countrymen, Ginsberg saw greed driving capitalism, industry, conformity, consumerism, government, war and all the things enslaving Cold War America.

Ginsberg drew as much from Blake as Blake drew from his prophet predecessors Milton and Ezekiel. Ginsberg, however, had to break away from Blake’s system, just as Blake did with his predecessors. “I must Create a System, or be enslav’d by another Mans / I will not Reason & Compare: my business is to create,” Blake declares in *Jerusalem* (J 10:20). Blake draws from Milton’s *Paradise Lost*, but understands that Milton had mistaken Urizen for God, as he claims in his great epic that love “hath his seat in Reason” (*PL* v: 102). Milton was sensitive to sex, yet he feared its irrational power (Damon 276). Blake claims that Milton saw this irrational power simply as relief, not an inspiration. Adam, who as the image of God is Reason, is warned particularly against allowing Eve to influence him with love; when she does, man falls. Blake corrects this vision in *Milton* the poem, as Milton the poet returns to earth to champion Los and Urthona against Urizen in the creation of Blake’s epic poem.

Blake also manages to successfully use Ezekiel’s visions of God, spinning wheels within wheels, blazing coals, four hayyot, a covering cherub, the end of time, and a style of chaotic storytelling as a base for his own prophecy, without being “enslaved” by its “system.” Blake changes these symbols, gives them added dimensions, significance, and relationships, and

incorporates them in their morphed state in a completely original narrative. His use of Ezekiel and Milton ties him to the tradition of the visionary, as he expresses visions of God, not from a heaven above but the imagination within. As this God dwells in the imagination of everyman, Blake's use of Ezekiel's vision doesn't make *Jerusalem* derivative of the book of Ezekiel, just as *Milton* is not simply derivative of *Paradise Lost*, so much as the God of imagination, the very same God Blake would assert came to Ezekiel on the banks of the Chebar. The shared symbols, characters, visions, and events of the two prophecies, then, don't make Blake Ezekiel's disciple, but rather a common disciple of "that God from whom all books are given, / Who in mysterious Sinais awful cave / To Man the wond'rous art of writing gave, / Again he speaks in thunder and in fire!" (*J* 3:3-5).

Ginsberg too, must reject Blake, and return to the pure divinity of imagination that inspired the prophecies of Blake, Ezekiel, and Milton, as well as Ginsberg's own visions:

There was a cycle that began with the Blake vision which ended on the train in Kyoto when I realized that to attain the depth of consciousness that I was seeking when I was talking about the Blake vision... I had to... renounce it... give up this continual churning through process of yearning back to a visionary state.

(Qtd. Ostriker 112).

Ginsberg still believed that Blake's poetry and his spirit caused "electronic changes" in his nervous system," but he did not need to "yearn back" to those visions, to rely on another's spirit or any visionary trance to write his poetry (*SM* 33). He had to look toward the divinity of imagination and the world around him, the God that he saw in the building outside his apartment during that first vision, the divinity Whitman saw in each blade of grass in *Song of Myself*, and Blake saw in everyman's imagination. A lady saint Shri Matakrishnaji in Brindban, whom

Ginsberg consulted about his spiritual problems, told him that he must accept Blake as his “guru” (SM 34). “There’s all kinds of different gurus,” he explains, “there can be living and nonliving gurus-apparently whoever initiates you, and I apparently was initiated by Blake in terms of at least having an ecstatic experience from him” (SM 34-35). Blake then, became to Ginsberg, not the source of his inspiration, but the guide to that same divine and imaginative inspiration that lies in all prophecy.

Even after his “renunciation” of William Blake, Ginsberg, performed and even recorded an album of *Songs of Innocence and or Experience*, singing them to his own melodies and instrumentation. “It was done for art’s sake like laying up treasures in heaven,” Ginsberg explains in the liner notes to the album. The project was not completed for Blake, Blake’s spirit, even Ginsberg himself. It was for art’s sake, and art belongs in heaven, the place where the imagination dwells without body or mind. This is where Ginsberg’s art exists, in the “starry temple” with Whitman, Milton, Shelly, and Blake:

Here I am naked without identity
 with no more body than the fine black tracery of pen mark on soft paper
 as star talks to star multiple beams of sunlight all the same myriad thought
 in one fold of the universe where Whitman was
 and Blake and Shelley saw Milton dwelling as in a starry temple
 brooding in his blindness seeing all-
 now at last I can speak to you beloved brothers of an unknown moon
 real Yous squatting in whatever form amidst Platanoic Vapors of Eternity
 I am another Star
 Will you eat my poems or read them (CP 164)

Ginsberg had to become “another Star” to become a true prophet, but, “as star talks to star” he places himself and his poetry in that same starry temple as his poet-prophet fathers. And, surely, not all the stars in this temple were prophets from the past. For some of Ginsberg’s greatest inspiration came from within his circle, from friends like Kerouac and William S. Burroughs.

William S. Burroughs:

“I don’t see any particular answer, and this month it seemed to me like actually an atomic war was inevitable... Somebody has got to sit in the British Museum again like Marx and figure out a new system; a new blue print. Another century has gone, technology has changed everything completely, so it’s time for a new utopian system. Burroughs is almost working on it.”

--Allen Ginsberg, 1965

When art leaves the frame and page but the frames and pages of assigned categories, a basic disruption of reality occurs. The literal realization of art. Success will write “apocalypse” across the sky.

--William S Burroughs, “Apocalypse”

William S. Burroughs was, as Gary Kamyia wrote in a *Salon* review of *Naked Lunch*, “20th-century drug culture’s Poe, its Artaud, its Baudelaire. He was the prophet of the literature of pure experience, a phenomenologist of dread... Burroughs had the scary genius to turn the junk wasteland into a parallel universe, one as thoroughly and obsessively rendered as Blake’s.” As Burroughs created this parallel universe, what Ginsberg ironically called “almost” a “new utopian system,” he dismissed Ginsberg’s mystical experiences as limited: “Why is it ‘useless’ and deceptive to look further? What are you afraid of? Why all this insistence on confining your attention to ‘non-supersensual reality,’ to ‘palpable objects’? Why this care to avoid any experience that goes beyond arbitrary boundaries (and boundaries set by others)?” (Qtd. Lardas 127). Burroughs was, according to his biography *Literary Outlaw*, the one who had lent his copies of Blake to Ginsberg when they had first met, just before Ginsberg had his first

visions" (112). Yet Burroughs came to dismiss Ginsberg's mystical experience of Blake as an abandonment of *this* world, as it was a passive stance that embraced a controlling force that exists outside the self. "Mysticism" Burroughs claims, "is just a word. I am concerned with *facts* on all levels of experience" (Qtd. Lardas 127). Burroughs told the American punk singer, songwriter, and poet Patti Smith that he was "fond of Blake, and it was just that simple... He said that Blake just saw what others did not" (Qtd. Dent 136). Blake didn't come to Burroughs in visions or dreams, but his writing and mythical landscapes did.

Like Blake and Ginsberg, William S. Burroughs claims that his most famous and influential work was not consciously written by him, but by voices, specifically, transitions from another planet. This "planet" is described in *Naked Lunch* as his own mythological creation, the interzone, a nightmarish modern urban wasteland in which the forces of good and evil vie for control of the individual and all of humanity. And in the tradition of William Blake's mythology, in the interzone, it is the individual, not good or evil, that must triumph. "The enemy" is control itself. The systems that Blake describes as "enslaving the vulgar," religion, science, and government, are known in Burroughs' mythology simply as the "virus," the sickness. Advancing society is destroying what Burroughs calls the "symbolizing, myth-making, intuitive, empathizing, telepathic faculty in man, so that his behavior can be controlled and predicted by the scientific methods that have proved so useful in the physical sciences" (NL).

While many critics and readers have been skeptical of Blake's claims of writing only what is dictated to him by voices, Burroughs's similar claims are almost universally accepted. His explanation is far less spiritual and romantic, as *Naked Lunch*, Burroughs's

most famous and influential book, was written sometime during a fifteen year long addiction to “junk” (a generic term for opium and opium derivatives). “I have no precise memory,” claims Burroughs, “of writing the notes which have now been published under the title *Naked Lunch*” (NL xxxv). Despite the less divine explanations for Burroughs’s mental “transmissions,” the mythology he created under the influence of hard-narcotics makes him his own kind of mystic and poet prophet concerned with a mythological world just as fallen, divided, and violent as Blake’s Albion.

Burroughs describes his mythology in terms of freedom:

Heaven and hell exist in my mythology. Hell consists of falling into enemy hands, into the hands of the virus power, and heaven consists of freeing oneself from this power, of achieving inner freedom, freedom from conditioning. I may add that none of the characters in my mythology are free. If they were free they would not still be in the mythological system, that is, in the cycle of conditioned action (*Algebra of Need* 40).

Just as Blake resisted forming concrete laws, consistent characters, or even certain or prescribed meaning in his prophetic poems, Burroughs developed methods used to escape from, as he called them, “antiquated concepts of the novel, from the nineteenth-century structure of moving characters around within a plot” (*Literary Outlaw* 323). Blake does not offer an objective reality, but rather an example of the systems that we must create for ourselves as readers “lest we be enslaved to those of others” (Dent 111). Likewise, in works such as *Naked Lunch*, Burroughs creates “crazy and counter-intuitive” systems that obliterate the subject through cut-ups and fold-ins.

Burroughs cut pages of his writing into strips while looking away; he then lined up the fragmented segments and typed the end result as his own prose. He often incorporated parts of texts from newspapers, Shakespeare, his contemporaries, and political speeches. This method, known as the cut-up method, was criticized as being more like plumbing than writing. As Burroughs got deeper into cut-ups, however, he came to believe that his accidental combinations of words were prophetic subliminal announcements, coming to him from a collective, extratemporal consciousness (*LO* 322).

Burroughs does not seem to be concerned with the ultimate relinquishment of authorial intent many critics would assume to be inherent in the cut-up method, as he seems more concerned with the imaginative reception of the resulting text rather than its imaginative creation. Burroughs believed that the cut-up method was a functional, materialistic approach that became a weapon to be used against texts and authors to reveal hidden messages and motivation. It was a form of guerrilla warfare against the authority of language, a way to “make explicit a psycho-sensory process that is going on all the time anyway” but inhibited by its inevitable expression in words (Lardas 233). He explains in *Minutes to Go*, a 1960 cut-up piece, “in THEE beginning was THE word.. The word was a virus.. ‘Function always comes before form’ L Ron Hubbard. Virus made man.. Man is virus.. Kick that virus habit MAN” (Qtd. Lardas 233). By arbitrarily rearranging the pages, paragraphs, even sentences and words in his and other authors’ writing, words and phrases are often given new meanings, or robbed of all meaning. The reader is thus left with the responsibility of imaginative creation. Burroughs, in the tradition of Blake’s prophecies, consciously avoids the creation of a system that might “enslave the vulgar.” In this way Burroughs, by working against the limitations of

language and the control and influence of the author, further democratizes the role of the poet, beyond what Blake, Emerson, and Whitman had done, by making the reader, the individual mind, the poet.

“I am a recording instrument” explains Burroughs in the introduction to *Naked Lunch*, “I do not presume to impose story, plot, continuity... Insofar as I succeed in direction recording of certain areas of psychic process I may have limited function... I am not an entertainer.” In this passage Burroughs is explaining his intentions in writing the novel, ultimately explaining why it is in fact not a novel at all. While *Naked Lunch* was written before Burroughs’ experiments with cut-ups, the work is still a jumble of events compiled in almost no particular order. As Burroughs put it, “You can cut into *Naked Lunch* at any intersection point” (NL 224). As a result, the book, much like Blake’s prophecies, does not have a fixed linear order like a conventional novel but is more like a serial poem in which each part illuminates and is illuminated by every other (Foster 161). This form exemplifies the thought patterns of the junky that wrote it, capturing the “psychic process.” More importantly, however, the book’s dreamlike form exposes Burroughs’ Blakean value of the individual, as the story’s movement and blending of reality and fantasy suggest that Burroughs is living in a solipsistic world of the imagination in which all that exists is the self. There is no difference between our fantasies and reality; they are all the same within the solipsistic world of the individual mind, a world in which a utopian existence lies beyond the control of the virus in the imagination. The Virus, however, like Moloch and Urizen is defined by control itself, and cannot easily be destroyed.

Jack Kerouac:

“Importunate fool that I was,
 I raved to fight Saviors
 Instead of listening in
 To the Light – still a fool”

--Jack Kerouac, *Mexico City Blues*, 22nd chorus

Jack Kerouac made a living as a gas station attendant, deckhand and scullion on ships, a newspaper sportswriter, railroad brakeman, “script synopsisizer” for 20th Century Fox New York, soda jerk, railroad yard clerk, railroad baggage handler, cotton picker, fruit picker, assistant furniture mover, sheet metal apprentice, forest service fire lookout, and a construction laborer. Through all this, however, Jean-Louis (Jack) Lebris de Kerouac knew, above all else, he was meant to be, and therefore was, a writer. He followed his own advice, as written in his enigmatic “Belief & Technique for Modern Prose,” when he, in his own words, “Scribbled secret notebooks, and wild typewritten pages, for [his] own joy” (*Kerouac Reader* 483). Kerouac claims to have been called to be a writer when his saintly brother Gerard died at age six; Jack was only four years old at the time. He answered this calling in the tradition of prophetic poets like William Blake with his representations of, as he called it, “the unspeakable visions of the individual” (483). Like Kerouac, Blake too, claims his brother, who also died tragically young, influenced and inspired his artistic life. William Blake claims his brother Robert appeared before him in 1788 and gave him the idea for “Illuminated Printing,” an ingenious method of relief etching achieved simply by painting his text and designs on a copperplate with a fine brush or pen in acid-resist, and then “biting” the plate in acid to reveal his outlines for printing and hand coloring.

It was not, of course, this intricate method of printing art and poetry that influenced Kerouac. Blake’s influence on the “King of Beats” is not as obvious or as clear as it is with

Burroughs and Ginsberg, and is mostly filtered through other American and often French Romantics. Kerouac, however, who repeatedly cited Blake as one of his favorite writers, referring to him in letters as “the great mystic,” is certainly continuing Blake’s tradition of poetic mysticism in a complex mythology all his own. Kerouac, like Blake, wrote from his mind’s eye, trying to capture in words something beyond rational thought or even comprehension. Where Blake wrote what was dictated to him by spirits and dead poets in visions, Kerouac wrote what came to him, in his life and in the spontaneity of the moment of creation. They were both Christians by birth and heart, but also dissenters, politically as well as religiously, and experimenters in personalized mythology and religion that combined philosophies of East and West with those of the imagination. Kerouac’s mythology, his “Legend of Duluo, ultimately diverges from Blake’s mythology as much as it draws from it, but at the heart of his work is the same Romanticism, Radicalism, and Mysticism that he loved in Blake.

Kerouac, even more so than Burroughs, is the most reluctant of the Beats to admit the influence of other artists on the development of his own methods of writing, especially his experimentations in spontaneous prose. Kerouac used this experimental form of writing with the belief that true visionary art comes not from a rational process of writing and revising, but a spontaneous following of “free deviation (association) of mind into limitless blow-on-subject seas of thought, satisfy yourself first, then reader cannot fail to receive telepathic shock and meaning-excitement by same laws operating in his own human mind” (*Kerouac Reader* 484). However revolutionary Kerouac insisted his prose and poetry was, it is recognized by critics like Regina Weinreich, that “he inherited a distinctly American tradition that began as early as Emerson and Whitman” (xxii). Weinreich also points out Kerouac’s antecedents in the genre of autobiographical fiction writers, writers such as Thomas Wolfe and Henry Miller. He also draws

from the adventure themes of such authors as Jack London (who writes about a hobo traveler in his 1907 *The Road*) and Ernest Hemingway (whose rendition of the events in Paris in the twenties as told in his 1964 *A moveable Feast* is accepted as “fiction”). These authors wrote not only about their lives in mythic fiction but in a similar “loose style.” Weinreich says this style:

suggests an expansive notion of form that can be seen in the large triptychs of Theodore Dreiser and John Dos Passos. The poetic sequence-particularly those works from *Leaves of Grass* (1855) to *Patterson* (1946) and beyond to which sections can easily be added-further suggests that a writer’s entire opus can be viewed as “ongoing” or, in fact, ‘one book.’ To this American tradition belongs Kerouac’s ‘one cast book,’ his *Legend of Duluoz* (xii)

The antecedents to Kerouac that Weinreich recognizes in earlier mythmakers and individualists like Wolf are influences Kerouac himself publicly recognized. It is the method by which the myth was created, the spontaneity, rawness, purity of the language that Kerouac used in jazz like riffs explaining elaborate visual details that have separated Kerouac from this influences and, according to Kerouac, all predecessors. Like all art, however, this method of “spontaneous prose” is, despite Kerouac’s claims, obviously not without influence.

Weinreich points out that Ralph Waldo Emerson explained a similar method to Kerouac’s in the section of *Self-Reliance* entitled “Spontaneity or Instinct,” where Emerson refers to the “American sublime” as a spontaneity that is “the essence of genius, of virtue, and of life, that deep force, the last fact behind which analysis cannot go” (Qtd. Weinreich 3). Later, in this tradition, Andre Breton and the surrealists experimented with automatic writing and free association and William James and Gertrude Stein experimented with automatic writing at Harvard. These experiments in spontaneous prose, however, all come in the shadow of William

Blake, who claimed that his epic poems *Milton* and *Jerusalem* were written effortlessly, the transcription of a voice speaking to the poet. What separates Kerouac's prose from the other American authors Weinreich identifies as immediately influencing his form, is his closer resemblance to the "great mystic," William Blake. Kerouac doesn't just write from the bottom of his mind, he writes from that primordial place beyond psychology, where a romantic God of the imagination and the individual dwells, it is more spiritual than just spontaneous, not just beat, but beatific.

Kerouac explained his influences and literary biography as a reader in a letter to his friend Donald Allen:

At 18 I read Hemingway and Saroyan and began writing little terse short stories in that general style. Then I read Tom Wolfe and began writing in the rolling style. Then I read Joyce and wrote a whole juvenile novel like "Ulysses" called "Vanity of Duluoaz. Then came Dostoevsky. Finally I entered a romantic phase with Rimbaud and Blake which I called my "self-ultimate" period, burning what I wrote in order to be "Self-ultimate." (*Selected Letters* 217)

Though Kerouac only mentions Blake among a laundry list of various influences, it is Blake's influence, along with French Romantics like Rimbaud, that has the most lasting effect on the "New Romanticism" he eventually creates in his literature and the Beat Generation in general. Blake is, ultimately, the poet that prompted Kerouac's sense of the "self-ultimate" and inspired him to create the highly mystical and romantic mythology that is the defining aspect of his art.

In a later letter, written in 1969, just months before his sudden and early death, Kerouac thanks his friend Phillip Whalen for looking after and sending Kerouac's personal library to him in Florida. This was an extraordinarily extensive library, which Kerouac describes as being

“practically everything in ‘English’ letters & literature from first to last.” The only book Kerouac mentions by name, however, is William Blake’s *Jerusalem*. He writes, “Blake’s *Jerusalem* alone is worth a fortune” (*Selected Letters* 465). This poem, so valued by Kerouac at the end of his life, seems also to have had, during his life, an indelible influence on his obsession with writing from “the bottom of the mind,” and at “the edges of language where the babble of the subconscious begins” (*Kerouac Reader* 483). Even his vocabulary, these terms used to describe the hinterland of human consciousness down to Kerouac’s archaic spelling of fortune, seem to have been pulled right out of Blake’s poetry. Blake also wrote from the bottom of his mind, writing what was “dictated” to him by spirits in his subconscious imagination. What makes Blake’s *Jerusalem* so valuable to Kerouac, however, is not the simple fact that Blake was writing with a spontaneous and prophetic method, but that the subject of the poem, the God of his prophecy, was this very creative process.

Los, the emanation of Urthona--the Zoa of imagination--is the hero of Blake’s *Jerusalem*, representing the imaginative artist and poet. He is Blake’s alter ego who is trying to save mankind, known in the poem as Albion, the ancient word for England. In his fallen state, Albion’s divine emanation, Jerusalem, has been hidden by his Jealousy, the furnace of imagination covered by the veil of reason and “moral law,” and Albion, himself, has fallen into the abyss “of the Sleep of Ulro” (*J* 4: 1-12). If Albion is to rise from his fallen state, a unification of contraries, including the four zoas, must be achieved through Albion’s sacrifice of self, or at least his “Great Selfhood Satan” (represented by the Covering Cherub) for Jesus, the divine, imaginative portion of the individual (*J* 96:35). Before this happens, however, this divine portion, sometimes called Jesus, but more commonly referred to as Albion’s imagination, Los, must rise again through the reestablishment of Jerusalem in the city of art, Golgonooza. The

balance of man's divinity, which has been lost in the so-called "Age of Enlightenment," defined by the philosophies of Locke and Newton, must be restored so that the war can end and contraries unite. "Why should Punishment Weave the Veil with Iron Wheels of War," asks Blake, "when Forgiveness might it Weave with Wings of Cherubim?" (*J* 22: 34).

Los's role in the redemption of Albion ultimately reflects Blake's own role as a poet, as it is revealed at the end of the poem that Blake's completion of *Jerusalem* coincides with Los's completion of Golgonooza. In a way Blake is Los and his poetry a Golgonooza-like redeemer of mankind. Blake proclaimed at the start of the poem, "I rest not from my great task, / To open the Eternal Worlds, to open the immortal Eyes / Of man inwards into the Worlds of Thought, into Eternity / Ever expanding in the Bosom of God. the Human Imagination" (*J* 5 18-20). With Albion's resurrection, this purpose in writing *Jerusalem* is finally realized, and Blake's position as a visionary poet and mystic confirmed within the context of *Jerusalem's* visionary landscape.

This complex mythology is full of shifting perspectives, constantly changing names for the visionary sleeper, rock, river, wheels, and temple-city. Its form is also, as I've already mentioned, free from "the modern bondage of Rhyming" and a regular Rhythm (*J* 3). The complexity seems to exemplify the ineffability of the vision through ambiguity and contradiction. Carl Jung would argue that it is the very nature of the visionary mode, to leave one who may have a "'primordial' experience astonished, confused, bewildered, put on guard, or even repelled, we demand commentaries and explanations, but Blake gives none. In the *Marriage of Heaven and Hell* Blake describes this imaginative and visionary mode as "energy," and "the enjoyments of Genius; which to Angels look like torment and insanity" (pl 6 pg 35). This method, seen as insane not only by Blake's fictional angels but his real life peers and contemporaries, must have spoken to Kerouac with extreme clarity, as Kerouac, in a very

Blakean way, claimed, "My position in the current American literary scene, is simply that I got sick and tired of the conventional English sentence which seemed to me so ironbound in its rules, so inadmissible with reference to the actual format of my mind as I had learned to probe it in the modern spirit" (*Kerouac Reader* 486).

For Kerouac, the impulse was to define himself by the more personal forms that told the truth about his experiences, regardless of inherited literary conventions. Kerouac's writing is an attempt to discover form, not to imitate it. Neither is it necessarily about rebelling against imitation. He writes in the 22nd Chorus of *Mexico City Blues*, "Importunate fool that I was, / I raved to fight Savors / Instead of listening in / To the Light – still a fool" (22). Kerouac neither modeled his art after nor in opposition to poets like Blake, but looked, in the same tradition, to the same "Light" in his imagination, to the "Urthona" and "Los" of his own mind, to discover experience in the act of writing about it, as if the language of the "mental spontaneous process" could expose some human experience as yet unknown simply because no writer had dared to set it down unimpeded by reason or intention.

Blake's intentions of opening the "immortal Eyes / Of man inwards into the Worlds of thought, into Eternity," in *Jerusalem* are very similar to Kerouac's "Belief & Technique for Modern Prose," in which he claims the "jewel center of interest" of beat literature, "is the eye within the eye... from the pithy middle eye out" (*Kerouac Reader* 484). Kerouac describes the eternal "Worlds of Thought" described by Blake as the "limitless blow-on-subject seas of thought" (484). Anne Charters notes that, "The sentences in *Doctor Sax* rolled in long orchestrated crescendos, as if Jack were a medium for his subconscious with his mind dictating to the pencil as it traveled over his notebook pages much as he imagined Blake and Yeats had been inspired in writing their poetry" (Charters 5). This subconscious mystical form of writing,

however, was inspired by, rather than written in imitation of Blake and other mystic poets.

Where Blake and Ginsberg wrote like prophets and shaman, from spiritual visions, and Burroughs claims to have received transmissions from other planets, Kerouac wrote from the inspiration of his own life and subconscious life. Kerouac's work falls into the tradition of Blake's mysticism not because it necessary draws from it, but because it draws so completely from Kerouac's own divine imagination, searching almost exclusively from his life, experiences, dreams and subconscious.

Kerouac developed his style by writing down not only the events of his life in spontaneous bursts of creativity, but by writing down every remembered dream between 1952 and 1960. The resulting collection of dream notebooks eventually became the experimental work *Book of Dreams*. Kerouac explains in the forward of this book:

The characters that I've written about in my novels reappear in these dreams in new weird dream situations, and they continue the same story which is the one story tat I always write about. The heroes of *On the Road*, *The Subterraneans*, etc. reappear here doing further strange things for no other particular reason than that the mind goes on, the brain ripples, the moon sinks, and everybody hides their heads under pillows with sleeping caps. (xv)

Kerouac, however, does not hide his "head," but rather captures the fleeting bizarre images of his dreams in quick, uninterrupted writing. "They were all written spontaneously, nonstop, just like dreams happen, sometimes written before I was even wide awake," Kerouac explains of his method, "I wrote nonstop so that the subconscious could speak for itself in its own form, that is, uninterruptedly flowing & rippling—Being half awake I hardly knew what I was doing let alone writing" (xv). This method of dream recording did not remain simply a method for creating

Book of Dreams. Instead, it was an experimental novel that helped develop a method Kerouac would end up using in recalling and recreating not just his dream life, but also his conscious life.

Blake appeared in his own mythology as the central figure of Los among a cast of real life philosophers and poets, religious figures and symbols, invented representations of his and everyman's psychology, and friends like his employer Hayley, who appears in *Milton* as the equivocal figure of Satan. Jack Kerouac, however, created his myth almost completely out of a cast of friends, acquaintances, and romantic partners from his own life. He appears in his own novels as Peter Martin, Sal Paradise, Leo Percepied, Ray Smith, and, most frequently Jack Duluoz. He explains:

Because of the objections of my early publishers I was not allowed to use the same personae names in each work. *On the Road*, *The Subterraneans*, *the Dharma Bums*, *Doctor Sax*, *Maggie Cassidy*, *Tristessa*, *Desolation Angels*, *Visions of Cody* and the others including this book *Big Sur* are just chapters in the whole work which I call *The Duluoz Legend*. (Qtd Charters)

Kerouac's poetry and prose comes, according to the author himself, from his own subconscious, his own autobiography, and experiences, thus, further democratizing his own role as poet and mystic. Kerouac continues a trend that moved from Blake to Emerson and Whitman. Unlike the work of his predecessors, however, Kerouac's *Legend of Duluoz* has not received much critical attention or praise. Many critics since the first publication of *On the Road* would agree with Truman Capote, who famously called Kerouac's novels "typing, not writing," or "the Romantic novel's last whimper" (Qtd Barlett 115). Has Kerouac taken poetic democracy to far? Is Harold Bloom right in his assertion that Kerouac has created art with "no literary value whatsoever," that the refusal to revise has resulted, like Burroughs, in relinquishment of all

authorial intent and craft, leaving nothing but nonsense popularized solely by an American obsession with hipsterism?

Kerouac's insistence that revision destroys imaginative art is certainly the most controversial and revolutionary aspect of this method of writing, as it precludes the writer's most basic method of control and craft. Kerouac's insistence that truth lies in the depths of every human mind emphasizes the notion that anyone can be a poet, writer, and artist. Conversely, however, most traditionally recognized artists, according to Kerouac, use revision and the "craft" of their art to hide these truths with lies. Kerouac explains:

If you don't stick to what you first thought, and to the words the thought brought, what's the sense of bothering with it anyway, what's the sense of foisting your little lies on others, or, that is, hiding your little truths from others? What I find to be really 'stupefying in its unreadability' is this laborious and dreary lying called craft and revision by writers, and certainly recognized by the sharpest psychologists as sheer blockage of the mental spontaneous process (*Kerouac Reader* 486).

Kerouac thus declares that we are all poets, but the poets themselves. Kerouac's almost dogmatic rejection of rational revision has many similarities to Blake's *Jerusalem* in which the furnace of imagination is covered by the veil of reason and "moral law" (*J* 4: 1-12). Rational thought, represented by the Zoa Urizen is, in Blake's mythology, the same "sheer blockage" Kerouac describes as interfering with the true imaginative process. Despite these similarities, however, Blake is also known for constantly revisiting and revising his poetry even after it is published, so that multiple versions of almost every poem exist in writing.

Despite all the criticism, Kerouac's "unrevised" prose is actually a methodology that denies the artist's traditional selectivity in favor of *another* kind of selectivity, a kind of "censorship imposed by the unconscious" (Qtd Weinreich 3). Kerouac's "spontaneous bop prosody" is epitomized in most people's minds by *On the Road*, which was typed in three weeks on a continuous roll of teletype paper as if it were one long paragraph, a statement of the experience that kept moving, the energy of the language bursting through the limitations of language, flowing with the relentless of time itself. Despite these famous stories behind the utterly spontaneous conception of *On the Road*, the novel actually underwent seven years of heavy revision before it was picked up to be published.

This revision was not, of course, Kerouac's idea of vision for *On the Road*. To make up for the damage done to *On the Road* by publishers, Kerouac ended up retelling the same story in *Visions of Cody*, this time rectifying the distortion caused by editorial revision of material in the earlier work. This retelling of the story with a more "spontaneous" method, however, is ironically, itself a revision through repetition. Repetition becomes Kerouac's control. As Kerouac writes about the real events of his life, he relives them, revising in the act of recording. This process of revision is often repeated, as the same events in Kerouac's life are transformed into fiction multiple times, like the overlapping narratives of *Visions of Cody* and *On the Road*.

Repetition is also central to much of Blake's prophetic poetry. For example, Robert Essick notes:

For all its freedom from the consensus realities that make texts readable, *Jerusalem* is highly repetitious in its imagery and actions. We are tossed about with maximum sound and fury but appear to get nowhere until suddenly, on the last few plates, the poem ends with an apocalyptic big-bang (251).

Similarly, Kerouac's legend tosses his readers about as individual works are published in a completely random order, bouncing from his college years to young adulthood, back to his childhood in Lowell, with the characters bouncing, within the text, from coast to coast, East to West, over and over, seemingly leading nowhere until Kerouac reaches his own "big-bang," the publication of *On the Road* in 1957. The success of *On the Road* and the subsequent fame marks the end, or at least the beginning of the end, of the Duluo legend in much the same way that the completion of *Jerusalem* marks the awakening of Albion from his slumber and the resurrection of mankind and the uniting of the Zoas. If Albion is to rise from his fallen state, a unification of contraries, including the four zoas, must be achieved through Albion's sacrifice of self, or at least his "Great Selfhood Satan" (represented by the Covering Cherub) for Jesus, the divine, imaginative portion of the individual (*J* 96:35). Where Blake's mythology ends with the salvation of mankind, through self-annihilation, Kerouac's ends, simply, with his own destruction, chronicled in the tragic *Big Sur*.

Big Sur describes the California coast, one of America's most beautiful regions, as if it were an abysmal and fearful wasteland, as Kerouac's Jack Duluo wonders, "why it has the reputation of being beautiful above and beyond its fearfulness, its Blakean groaning roughrock Creation throes" (*Kerouac Reader* 403). Jack Kerouac and Jack Duluo have gone through an immense transition since the publication of *On the Road* three years prior. Since his rise to fame and fortune, Jack Duluo, mirroring the real life of the author, has spent most of his days sitting in his mother's Long Island home drinking in quantities he previously could not afford, writing, and dodging fans and media. The drinking and desolation has left him numb and miserable, yearning to return to the West, back to the freedom and obscurity that characterize him as he appears in previous novels, not as he has become. For the first time, Jack travels west not by

hitchhiking, but by train the entire cross country trip. He is not on the open road on this trip; instead he is trapped in a tiny roomette bunk, a cell with a lumpy bed and restlessness. It is certainly not the first time Kerouac describes himself as restless. It is, however, the first time he is restless while traveling, while “on the road.”

Kerouac claims, through his alter ego, to be going mad, the alcohol numbing his brain (416). Likewise the land has become a “roaring mystery in the dark” (400). Just as Albion is both the English Island as well as the human soul, Kerouac uses, in *Big Sur*, mankind’s relationship with nature as a mirror by which to gauge his own soul. He sits for hours every night “like an idiot in the dark writing down the sound of the waves” (408). “I don’t feel like it,” he insists, “it’s my duty (and probably drove me mad)” (409). Jack isn’t merely contemplating the sound of the sea; he is contemplating his own life and mortality. Kerouac’s intensely detailed and tortured descriptions of his views of nature and himself at Big Sur eventually culminated in a nervous breakdown. The frightful sea in *Big Sur* represents the fear of death ever rising within Kerouac’s aging mind. He was no longer the young recluse careening across the country that he was in *On the Road*. All the irresponsibility and freedom of his youth was now taking a toll on his psychological and physical health, as he desperately searched for spiritual answers and “sweet salvation.”

Years before this breakdown, as far back as 1954, Jack Kerouac began searching for spiritual enlightenment, and what he called “sweet salvation,” by studying Buddhist texts. Having been raised a strict French Catholic, and never really receiving a traditional Buddhist education, Jack Kerouac’s resulting spirituality was a jumbled blend of East and West, of “raving to fight Saviors,” and “listening in to the Light” (*Mexico City Blues* 22). Kerouac embraced the fundamental Buddhist ideal that all life is a sorrowful dream in an attempt to deal with an

exceptionally difficult time in his life occurring at about the same time he wrote *The Subterraneans*. His spiritual “enlightenment” is immediately apparent in his writing, as he attempted to make the impossible transition from being the character of Sal Paradise, careening across America, taking drugs, casual sex, and just digging life to its fullest, to the Character of Ray Smith, who desires only to be kind and patient, thus finding peace through intuition, mystic insight, and meditation. Kerouac and the rest of Western Civilized man are not so easily deducible to this condition and, while very interested in Buddhist ideals, Kerouac ultimately describes himself as an “old-fashioned Catholic mystic” proclaiming faith in the ultimate goodness and oneness of existence, minimizing, while never fully denying, life’s significance and summing up man’s purpose on earth as the need to experience suffering preparatory to his knowing God.

Kerouac’s yoking of Eastern and Western philosophies, while not necessarily directly influenced by Blake, clearly has its cultural roots in the pantheistic works of Blake and other English Romantics and Transcendentalists. While not as explicitly influenced by Buddhism as the Beats, there are clear similarities between William Blake’s philosophical system and that of Buddhism, particularly the Ch’an or Zen School. Scholars are aware that William Blake knew the Bhagavad Gita in its first English translation by Sir Charles Wilkins. And Kathleen Raine suggests that Blake also knew “some of the Proceedings of the Calcutta Society of Bengal promoted by Sir William Jones.” Blake’s *A Descriptive Catalogue of Pictures* even has an entry for a piece called “The Bramins-A Drawing.” Blake incorporated these Buddhist texts with those of Christianity, as he fundamentally believed, as he described in “All Religions are One,” that “As all men are alike (tho, infinitely various) So all Religions & as all similar have one

source.” It was also his opinion that “The philosophy of the east taught the first principles of human perception.”

Centuries before Blake’s birth, Buddha declared what is “real” in life cannot be discovered through rational thought but through intuition, mystical insight, and meditation (Hipkiss 65). Finding enlightenment is not a process of analytical deliberation, rather it is seen, felt, and imagined without consciousness. One must contemplate the nothingness of reality. The Buddhist, according to Robert Hipkiss, would recommend one to do this by dwelling on their *felt* responses, accepting them, becoming intensely aware of them until “the central trend of feeling emerges” (65). The search for an understanding of this unreality or “void” is the primary subject of both Blake and Kerouac’s poetry and prose. In *Jerusalem*, when Albion awakens from his slumber of five thousand years, marking the redemption of England and all mankind through the triumph of art and imagination over selfishness and oppressive reason and the mystical union of all things, the world that existed before is revealed as “a Vision, all a Dream” (J 96:36). Kerouac also wrote that “Life is nothing but a short vague dream encompassed round by flesh and tears” (Qtd. in Charters, 586).

In the end, however, Kerouac wanted very much to believe in a beneficent God at the heart of things and in the value of human life. And with a final nervous / spiritual break-down, documented in *Big Sur*, Kerouac abandons all his connections with Buddhism and returns to the Catholic church of his youth (French 19). This return to Christ, however, does not closely mirror Albion’s acceptance of Jesus at the apocalyptic close of Blake’s *Jerusalem*. While both epics end with annihilation of the self and acceptance of Jesus, it is in two distinctly different ways. For Blake, it is the destruction of the self, “that self-seeking which is the root of all the Christian errors” (Damon 93). Like many ideas in *Jerusalem*, this initially seems extremely contradictory;

the idea that Albion must “annihilate” his “self” in order to be reunited with God, whose divinity exists within the individual. It must be understood, however, that the “self,” described here, is the innate selfishness with which we are born. It is not, according to Damon, “the central Humanity, but is opposed to it” (363). Rather it is the “Natural Selfish Chastity,” in which we become “One Great Satan enslav’d to the most powerful Selfhood: to murder the Divine Humanity” (*J* 49:24). The fact that this covering cherub, existing within the individual, can be so easily mistaken as the “Divine Humanity,” also within the individual, is exactly what makes it so dangerous. When most people look inward for Divinity, they seem to focus only on themselves, on the cherub that is “covering” the divinity beyond but still within. Jerusalem is thus hidden within the Covering Cherub “as in a Tabernacle / Of threefold workmanship, in allegoric delusion & woe” (*J* 89:44-45).

Jack Duluo, along with the real life Kerouac, does not annihilate this “Great Selfhood Satan” in a sacrifice for Jesus and salvation, but annihilates his life and spiritual quest for the Jesus of his childhood education in French Catholic Sunday Schools. His epic doesn’t end with an apocalyptic bang, but a whimper, accepting Blake’s “threefold workmanship, in allegoric delusion & woe,” instead of throwing it into Los’s fire. “There is no darker moment in the Legend of Duluo,” writes Anne Charters, than this end, as Kerouac never resolves the irresolvable contradictions of his earthly vanity as a writer. When he went on after *Big Sur* “to speak for things” in later and lesser books like *Vanity of Duluo* and *Satori in Paris*, his tone reflects a new self-consciousness. The promises of his dreams and visions, captured on the pages of his manuscripts, became more compelling to him than the reality of the life he actually lived when he wasn’t writing about it. Kerouac eventually stopped publishing, lost contact with most of his old friends and characters from his life and novels, and slipped into alcoholism and

deep depression. The unsaved Jack Kerouac died in St. Petersburg, Florida, in 1969, at the age of forty-seven.

It is partially Kerouac and the other Beats' understanding of Christian and Buddhist religions and their influence on the human spirit and society that make the Beats not merely beat down and beat tired but ultimately beatific. The Beats, however, did not limit their prophecies to the enslaving systems of religious dogma. Their prophets were found in poetry and their God in the imagination. Ginsberg, Burroughs, and Kerouac each composed their unique prophecies influenced, to varying degrees, by drugs, alcohol, Christianity, Buddhism, the interzone, spontaneity, their own lives, but above all else, they were inspired by poetry, the great writings and visions of poets and prophets before them. One poet who seems to be at the heart of this influence is William Blake, or rather, it is his vision that is at the heart of this poetry. Los's fiery furnaces, blazing in the mind's eye of each of the Beats as they continued to prophesize that which is beyond reason and against the political status quo. They resurrect Blake's ideas within their own mythologies each as divergent from as inspired by "the great mystic."

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